Filmography of Tim Burton: A Study in the Application of Bharatmuni's Rasa Theory and Cognitive Film Theory to Cinema.

A SYNOPSIS

Submitted in the partial fulfilment for the requirements of

Doctor of Philosophy

In English.

Dr.Namita Bhatia
Supervisor

Aakankshaa Dubey
Research Scholar

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH STUDIES, FACULTY OF ARTS

DAYALBAGH EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTE (DEEMED UNIVERSITY)

DAYALBAGH, AGRA – 282005

2020

Films, just as literature, have the ability to bring forth varied ideas and thoughts on the screen and to create an impact not only through words or narration but with visual images, music, colour schemes, etc. With the expansion of the literary domain, scholars realised the close connection between literature and films. The field of literature and films alike, emphasize on narrative and the art of storytelling. Whether it is a reader of a literary work or a film spectator, both are introduced to stimuli which lead to a wide range of perceptions and interpretations that vary largely on the basis of an individual's subjective reasoning and understanding. Both literature and films lay stress on expression and education which further reflects the correlation between the two.

In ancient Indian Aesthetics, sage Bharatmuni focused greatly on the significance of the art of expression through his theory of *Rasa*. The theory of *Rasa* entered the literary scene in the 1st century B.C. through *Nātyashāstra,* the seminal work of Bharatmuni and further rose as the cornerstone of Indian Aesthetics. The study of Sanskrit Aesthetics flourished from Bharata (5th century B.C.) to Panditraja Jagannatha (17th century A.D.). The term *Rasa* consists of two letters i.e. 'Ra' which means 'to give' and 'Sa' which means 'motion'. Etymologically, *Rasa* refers to 'relish', 'gustation', 'taste', *saveur* (French for 'flavour'), *geschmack* (German for 'taste' or 'liking'), etc. The Rasa theory is , therefore , one which focuses on aesthetic enjoyment which leads to an ecstatic state of *rasanā, āsvada* or *carvana* ; the closest explanation to which can be aesthetic relish. The theory of rasa holds as Sushil Kumar De in his book *Sanskrit Poetics as a Study of Aesthetic* elaborates, "What is manifested is not the rasa itself, but its relish ; not the mood itself, but its reflection in the form of a subjective condition of aesthetic enjoyment in the reader" (De, p.52).

In the *Rasādhyāya* of *Nātyashāstra,* Bharatmuni elaborates his view "*Na hi rasādrite kaschidarthah pravartate*" ("an idea is not considered meaningful and is not transmitted if rasa is not evoked"; Ghosh 51) i.e. if the emotional involvement of the spectator is not observed. *Rasa* is aroused only when the audience relates to the actor and feels the sentiments and emotions of the actors. According to the theory, a work of art is viewed, understood and read

with the purpose or aim to experience aesthetic pleasure. *Rasa* is realised by the reader and is not an entity that is objective.

Bharatmuni forwards his idea that *Bhāva* is the epicentre of *Rasa*. He gave the world a *Rasa-sūtra* –

'*Vibhāvanubhāva vyabhicārisaṃyogat rasaniṣpattiḥ'*

Through the above mentioned sūtra, Bharatmuni explains the idea of the emergence of *Rasa* i.e. by the unison (*saṃyogat*) of *vibhāvas, anubhāvas* and *sanchāribhāvas.* The combination of these three contribute to the origin of rasa. The physical causes i.e. the actors, the environmental background, the situations emerging in the drama, etc., which further give rise to emotive and mental states are called *vibhāvas*. They are the stimuli which generate the *sthāyibhāvas* (permanent mental states) in the audience. The physical manifestation of a basic mental state i.e. the bodily expressions and gestures which are motivated towards bringing out the essence of an emotive state are called *anubhāvas*. The *sthāyibhāvas* which can also be termed as permanent psychological states are the emotions which reside permanently in every person's heart. On the other hand, the *sanchāribhāvas* are the transient psychological states which act as catalysts for the permanent emotions. They intensify the impact of *sthāyibhāvas* and are short-lived.

In the VIth chapter of *Nātyashāstra*, Bharatmuni lists the eight rasas and their corresponding *sthāyibhāvas* as follows – *Sṛṅgara Rasa* (*sthāyibhāva – Rati*), *Hāsya Rasa* (*sthāyibhāva – Hāsya*), *Adbhuta Rasa* (*sthāyibhāva – Vismaya*), *Vīra Rasa* (*sthāyibhāva – Utsāha*), *Karuna Rasa* (*sthāyibhāva – Śoka*), *Raudra Rasa* (*sthāyibhāva – Krodha*), *Bhayānaka Rasa* (*sthāyibhāva – Bhaya*), *Bībhatsa Rasa* (*sthāyibhāva – Jugupsā*). The *Shānta Rasa* (*sthāyibhāva – Nirveda*) was later added by Anandvardhan which then became an integral part of the theory.

The analysis of aesthetics encompasses the understanding of beauty in art, the realization of *Ananda* or joy that follows an experience of beauty. Rasa theory focuses on the emotional responses of the audience, the emotions experienced or felt by them. At the same time, it aims at arousing emotions in the spectator at the appropriate time. *Rasa* is produced by factors like

music, voice, dance, gestures, dress, makeup, tone , metre and environment. *Rasa* is defined as the 'soul' of a work of art through which it becomes alive. Critics have ,thus, given a special position to the theory of rasa in the sphere of Indian Aesthetics. Prof. P. Sriramachandrudu opines :

> The Indian literary criticism has given the highest place to Rasa. Everything else like *Alamkara, Guna, Riti, Vrtti* and *Parvrtti*, etc finds its place in a kavya so far as it is useful for Rasa. That is the reason why only those poets who attained perfection in depicting Rasa are given a very high place in India. Valmiki, Vyasa, Kalidasa and Bhavabhuti are the standing examples for such perfection. It is said in praise of such poets –
>
> "Jayanti te sukrutino rasasiddhaha kavisvaraha
> Nasty yesham yashakaye jaramarnajam bhayam" ("Those poets may live long who have gained popularity through the employment of Rasa for they do not fear death and old age to mangle their fame"; Chaturvedi, p.142)

Rasa theory which emerged many centuries ago through the works of Bharatmuni and later flourished through oeuvres of great writers like Anandvardhana and Panditaraja Jagannath focused largely on theatre and the art of performance. Gradually, as years passed scholars started adding new dimensions to the applicational implications of the theory. The principles of the theory seeped into the techniques of the art of cinema. Actors and stage artists throughout the globe began following the postulates of the theory to enhance their acting skills and to gain maximum audience connection. The theory, thus, spread globally influencing artists in various fields and Indian poetics started being recognised on international scale with tremendous encouragement.

Films have been closely intertwined with human culture and society since decades. Cinema (i.e. the production of films as an artform) in the modern world has become an exponential and powerful source of expression, education and amusement. Recent researches have unveiled more deep-rooted facets of cinema's influence on society and culture. S.C. Noah Uhrig's research paper

entitled *Cinema is Good for You : The Effects of Cinema Attendance on Self-Reported Anxiety and Depression and Happiness* , discusses how,

> the narrative and representational aspects of film make it a wholly unique form of art. The unique properties of attending cinema can have decisively positive effects on mental health…In a nutshell, cinema attendance can be both a personally expressive experience, good fun and therapeutic at the same time. In a rather ground-breaking study, Konlaan, Bygren and Johansson found that frequent cinema attendees have particularly low mortality risks – those who never attended the cinema had mortality rates nearly 4 times higher than those who visit the cinema at least occasionally (Konlaan, Bygren and Johansson, 2000). Their finding holds even when other forms of social engagement are controlled, suggesting that social engagement specifically in an artistic milieu is important for human survival. (Uhrig, p.2)

Cinema mirrors the society and its trends both of the present and of the past. Films are narratives of people's lives and they offer different and varied interpretations to every individual. Films are a medium to establish communication and understanding not only of the culture but also of human emotions and sentiments. It is about escapism to the audience, wherein a person emotes the emotion appearing on the screen. He/she connects with the characters, the storyline, the background score which further influences his/her life in some or the other way. Films enlighten and open portals of innumerable possibilities of the future and simultaneously remind us of our history alongside making the audience realise their present. In today's world of technological advancement and digital learning, movies still are the greatest source of entertainment. Now, it has become easier for people of far off countries to connect with mainstream cinema globally. In his research paper titled *Toward a General theory of Film Spectatorship* (2004), Todd Oakley, a researcher at Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, Ohio, U.S. elaborates how,

> Film spectatorship – or at least the most interesting aspects of it – is a conscious activity (Currie, 1999) : making sense of film is significantly the same as making sense of the real world (Anderson, 1996) ; the spectator uses perpetual and conceptual systems developed for interacting with a three-dimensional world to interact with and make sense of a two-dimensional world; therefore, there is no specific, encapsulated, cognitive module for experiencing the movements and gestures of fictional characters projected on a screen, nor are there specific cognitive modules for aesthetic experiences generally….(Oakley, p.1-2)

Films, thus, hold a significant position in the recital of our civilisation. They inspire, educate, often give rise to a debate, a conversation and so much more. Most importantly, films let the audience briefly escape , explore and venture something new. Being closely linked with literature, films too, began to be studied as an academic subject throughout the globe. The term assigned to the analysis of film-making was 'film studies'. Film studies rapidly grew as an area of research. Scholars started critiquing films just like literature. With the addition of new spheres and disciplines, film-studies also gained its dynamic nature similar to literature. As years passed, interdisciplinarity swept in film studies as well. Films were now scrutinized under the lens of concepts from established disciplines like anthropology, psychoanalysis, gender studies, etc. Film studies or Film theory branched out into numerous categories. One such significant branch of film theory is Cognitive film theory.

Cognitive film theory came into light in the mid-1980s and rose as a distinctive research pattern in film studies. The relationship of human psychology and films has always been a topic of interest for film theorists and several studies on films have been concluded by establishing the notion that both films and human psychology are closely connected. The term 'cognition' comes from the Latin word '*cognoscere*', which means 'to apprehend' which further means to understand or recognise or to be conscious of through the senses. Earlier, many theorists believed that mimicked processes were irrational. In order to reject this belief, cognitive film theorists raised their arguments to elaborate the rationality of the mimesis. They held the opinion that

films engage the mental processes in the audience. Gregory Currie writes that a cognitive film theorist gives importance to the,

> ways in which our experience of cinematic images and cinematic narrative resemble our experiences of seeing and comprehending events and processes in reality…This leading idea suggests a method as well as a doctrine in seeking to understand our responses to film, apply the best available theories of perception, information processing, hypothesis-building, and interpretation. (Currie, pp.106)

Cognitive film theory establishes the relationship between the viewer's psychology, the reactions of the audience, the content of the film and the context in which the spectator's experience of viewing is observed. The theory says that films are a source of multi-dimensional interpretations which are constructed by the viewer's cognitive mind. The prominent cognitive film theorists include Noel Caroll, David Bordwell, Greg M. Smith, Per Persson, etc.

The purpose of cognitive film theory is to apprehend activities of the human brain such as David Bordwell says, "recognition, comprehension, inference-making, interpretation, judgement, memory and imagination" (Bordwell p.2). It is believed by cognitive theorists that to understand the working of human psyche and to comprehend their actions one needs to posit the perceptions, ideas, sentiments, desires, beliefs and intentions. In present times, the theory holds a significant position in the sphere of cinema studies. Unlike, other film theories that focus on specific areas, cognitive film theory concentrates on bringing forth a holistic view of a film; analysing not only the thematic and stylistic parts in a work but also assessing the semantic and psychological strains as observed in a film. It is largely based upon the reactions and experiences of the audience and the film spectator's ability to recognise, understand, memorize and connect the actions performed on stage with reality.

Tim Burton or Timothy William Burton was born on August 25, 1958 in Burbank, California. He majored in animation and further joined the California Institute of Arts in Valencia, California for studying character animation at a very young age. He later joined hands with Walt Disney

Studios in 1980 after completing his graduation and worked as an animator there for not more than a year and then decided to quit.

After making several short films, Burton made *Pee-Wee's Big Adventure,* his first feature film in the year 1985, which became an instant box-office hit. Burton was now identified as a distinguished filmmaker due to his unique style of film-making. In 1989, Burton stepped into mainstream cinema with another hit *Batman* and its sequel *Batman Returns* in 1992. Burton also encouraged and created stop-motion animation films like *The Nightmare Before Christmas* in 1993 which won the Saturn Award for the Best Fantasy Film. Burton's [1]filmography showed variation and his style was appreciated for its distinctive blend of fantasy and horror.

An Academy Award winner for the Best Art Direction, *Batman* (1989) soared up as a commercial hit introducing the all time favourite character of Batman from the DC Comics Universe. Soon after Batman's 50th anniversary of his introduction to the comic world, Tim Burton released his directorial adaptation of the character. The film was highly appreciated for its dark treatment of the characters as well as the dark and haunted settings; which were quite contrary to the comedic and child-oriented representation of the characters previously done in media. Burton's art was thus introduced to the commercial mainstream cinema with movies like *Batman*.

Being the first collaboration between Tim Burton and Johnny Depp, *Edward Scissorhands* (1991) is a dark romantic fantasy film written by Tim Burton and Caroline Thompson, produced by Denise Di Novi and Burton and directed by Tim Burton. The plot opens with an inventor (Vincent Price) assembling a synthetic man Edward i.e. Johnny Depp. After the sudden death of the inventor due to a heart attack, Edward is left incomplete with a pair of scissors for hands. He is then accepted by a suburban family and the daughter Kim falls in love with Edward. The story traces the life and struggle of Edward whose only wish is to be loved and who is trying to find his place in the lives and hearts of people.

[1] According to Collins dictionary, the term refers to a list of films of a particular director, actor, genre, etc.

Tim Burton's *The Nightmare Before Christmas* released in 1993 is a stop-motion musical dark fantasy movie written by Tim Burton. The idea behind the film originated through a poem written by Burton while he was working for Walt Disney Feature Animation as an animator in the year 1982. The movie revolves around the character of Jack Skellington who is the 'King of Halloween Town'. Jack accidentally enters Christmas Town through a portal and decides to bring the celebration with all its festivities to his homeland. This decision made by Jack leads to utter confusion and chaos in Halloween Town.

Set in a 19th century village in Europe, *Corpse Bride* or *Tim Burton's Corpse Bride* (2005) is an animated stop-motion feature which covers the story of Victor who accidently ends up in the Land of the Dead married to a mysterious Corpse Bride just few days before his wedding with Victoria. Leaving Victoria waiting bereft in the world of the living, Victor finds amusement and thrill in the underworld in contrast to the strict Victorian behavioural patterns. He later ascertains his love for Victoria and soon realizes that nothing from the living world or beyond can stop him from uniting with his beloved.

Another hit on box-office directed by Tim Burton, *Sweeney Todd : The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* was released in 2007 as a musical slasher film. This film is an adaptation of Hugh Wheeler and Stephen Sondheim's 1979 musical of this name. Setup in Victorian London, this film recites the story of Sweeney Todd who is a barber and a serial killer on a spree of murdering his customers with the aid of Mrs. Lovett, his co-conspirator. The film won numerous awards, such as Golden Globe Awards for the Best Motion Picture – Musical or Comedy, Best Actor – Musical or Comedy, an Academy Award for Best Art Direction, etc.

Inspired by Walt Disney's 1951 animation of the same name and Lewis Carroll's novels *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass* ; Tim Burton's *Alice In Wonderland* (2010) is the narrative of a nineteen-year-old girl Alice Kingsleigh who is on a quest to defeat the Red Queen and restore the throne to the White Queen who is the rightful heir to the crown of Underland. Alice is the one who can slay Jabberwocky (a dragon-like

creature). The movie was nominated for various prestigious awards and at the 83rd Academy Awards, it won the award for Best Art Direction and Best Costume Design. From this film began the trend of Walt Disney Studio's making of live-action fantasy and fairy tale movies.

Studies have been conducted on the Rasa Theory from varied points of view, such as in the essay titled *Rasa : Natyashastra to Bollywood* (2018), Charu Uppal discusses the relationship between Indian Aesthetics and Indian Cinema. In another research paper entitled *Shakespeare, Cinema and Indian Poetics* (2018) written by Anil Zankar, the researcher discusses the works of William Shakespeare under the light of Adaptation Theory and the strains of Indian Poetics as observed in the same. In a research paper *Genre Fiction and Aesthetic Relish : Reading rasa in contemporary times* written by Anwesha Maity, the writer throws light on the significance of Rasa Theory in contemporary literature and society.

In a similar manner, studies have also been conducted on Cognitive film theory . For instance, Pascal Boyer in his research paper *Cognitive Aspects of Religious Ontologies : How Brain Processes Constrain Religious Concepts* (1999) examines the human mind and its reception of the concepts of religion. Corijn Van Mazijk in his research essay *Husserl, impure intentionalism and sensory awareness, Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* traces the relationship between phenomenology and cognitive sciences and the sensory awareness triggered by literature elaborating the role of Edmund Husserl in the development of phenomenology.

Research work has been done on the films of Tim Burton such as Samantha Schafer's *The Dark Side of a Genius : The Influence of German Expressionism on Tim Burton* (2012) elaborates as the title suggests, the impact of German Expressionism as observed in the films of Tim Burton. Another research article by Alice Balloch titled *Tim Burton and the Uncanny* (2016), discusses the use of the uncanny and the strains of gothic culture as visible in the films of Burton.

To the best of my knowledge, no research study similar to the proposed one has been attempted before. The researcher aims to contribute to the field of literature by bringing in new

perspectives on the topic and exploring new dimensions of knowledge by establishing the relationship between cinema, human psyche and Indian aesthetics. The ancient Indian Rasa theory and modern Cognitive film theory have been chosen to give a broader scope to the study and to explain the relevance of ancient Rasa theory in the present day context. In this process, the study will bring forth the similarities and dissimilarities between the two theories. Many opinions held by the contemporary cognitive film theorists were already mentioned by the sage Bharatmuni which shows the richness of Indian literature and Indian aesthetics.

The objectives of the proposed study would be:

- To make a detailed study of Rasa theory and Cognitive film theory.
- To analyse the selected films in the light of Rasa theory and Cognitive film theory.
- To assess the cinematic techniques employed by Tim Burton in the selected films.
- To examine the contribution of Tim Burton to cinema.
- To draw a comparative study of Indian Aesthetics, Cognitive film theory and Cinema.

Keeping these objectives in perspective, the tentative chapter division would be as follows:

- **Chapter I: -**

  Introduction - Part A: Dimensions of Rasa Theory and Cognitive Film Theory.

  Part B: Man Behind the Lens : Burton's Life and Filmography.

- **Chapter II:-**

  The Emotional and Psychological Converge into Reality : An Application of Rasa Theory and Cognitive Film Theory.

- **Chapter III: -**

  The Burtonesque Style in Cinema : Cinematic Techniques employed by Tim Burton.

- **Chapter IV:-**

  Modern Society in the Films of Tim Burton.

- **Chapter V:-**

  Conclusion.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary sources :-

Alice in Wonderland. Dir. Tim Burton. Screenplay: Linda WoolVerton. Perf. Johnny Depp, Mia Wasikowska. Walt Disney Pictures, 2010. Film.

Batman. Dir. Tim Burton. Screenplay: Sam Hamm, Warren Skaaren. Perf. Jack Nicholson, Michael Keaton. Warner Bros. Pictures, 1989. Film.

Corpse Bride. Dir. Mike Johnson, Tim Burton. Screenplay: John August, Caroline Thompson, Pamela Pettler. Perf. Johnny Depp, Helena Bonham Carter. Warner Bros. Pictures, 2005. Film.

Edward Scissorhands. Dir. Tim Burton. Screenplay: Caroline Thompson. Perf. Johnny Depp, Winona Ryder. 20th Century Fox, 1995. Film.

Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street. Dir. Tim Burton. Screenplay: John Logan. Perf. Johnny Depp, Helena Bonham Carter. Paramount Pictures, 2007. Film.

The Nightmare Before Christmas. Dir. Henry Selick. Screenplay: Caroline Thompson. Perf. Danny Elfman, Catherine O'Hara. Touchstone Pictures, 1993. Film.

Bordwell, D. *Narration in the Fictional Film.* Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985. Print.

Ghosh, Manmohan. *The Natyashastra : Ascribed to Bharatmuni,* translated by Manmohan Ghosh. Calcutta : Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1951. Print.

Secondary Sources :-

Allen Richard, and Malcolm Turvey. *Wittgenstein, Theory and the Arts.* Abingdon-on-thames: Routledge, 2002. Print.

Andrew, Dudley J. *Concepts in Film Theory.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984. Print.

Balme, Christopher B. *The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre Studies.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008. Print.

Barkman, Adam, and Antonio Sanna. *A Critical Companion to Tim Burton.* Washington DC: Lexington Books, 2017. Print.

Bordwell, David. *A Case for Cognitivism.* Journal IRIS Vol. 9 (11-40) : 1989. *Google Book Search.* Web. 15th August 2019.

Bordwell, David. *Poetics of Cinema.* Abingdon-on-Thames: Routledge, 2008. Print.

Burton, Tim. *Burton on Burton.* Edited By- Mark Salisbury. London: Faber and Faber, 1997. Print.

Chaturvedi, B.M. *Some Unexplored Aspects of the Rasa Theory*. Trans. P. SriRamchandrudu. Gadag: Vidyanidhi Prakashan, 1996. *Google Book Search*. Web. 14th August 2019.

Corrigan, Timothy. *Film and Literature: An Introduction and Reader (IInd Edition).* Abingdon-on-Thomas: Routledge, 2011. Print.

Corrigan, Timothy. *A Short Guide to Writing About Film.* New York: Harper Collins College Publishers, 1999. Print.

De, Sushil Kumar. *Sanskrit Poetics as a Study of Aesthetic.* Whitefish: Literary Licensing LLC, 2012. Print.

French, Christopher C., and Andrew M. Colman. *Cognitive Psychology.* London: Longman, 1995. Print.

Krishna, Daya. *India's Intellectual Traditions: Attempts at Conceptual Reconstructions.* New Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass, 1987. Print.

Michaels, Axel, and Christoph Wulf. *Emotions in Rituals and Performances.* New Delhi: Routledge India, 2012. Print.

Oakley, Todd. "Toward a General Theory of Film Spectatorship". Cleveland: Case Western Reserve University, 2003. Web. 5th August 2019.

Pathak, R.S. *Comparative Poetics.* New Delhi: Creative Books, 1992. Print.

Potter, Nicole, and Mary Fleisher, and Barbara Adrian. *Movement for Actors.* New York: Allworth Press, 2017. Print.

Synder, Mary H. *Analyzing Literature-to-Film Adaptations.* New York: Continuum, 2011. Print.

Uhrig, S.C.Noah. "Cinema is Good for You: The Effects of Cinema Attendance on Self-Reported Anxiety or Depression and "Happiness"", Iser Working Paper (2005-14). Colchester: University of Essex, 2005. Print.